

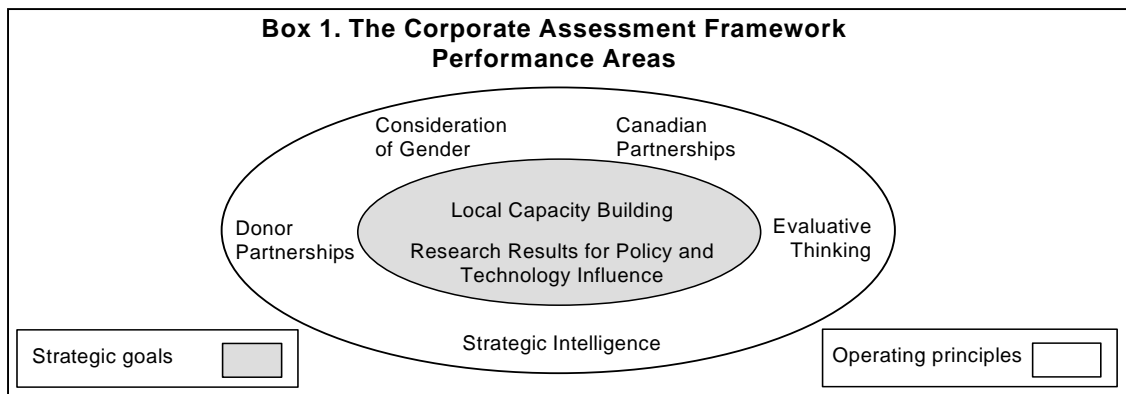
# The Corporate Assessment Framework

March 2004

This highlight provides an overview of the Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF), the most recent component of IDRC's Evaluation System. It briefly describes what the CAF is, its purpose, the way it will work, and the implications it holds for IDRC programs.

## What is the Corporate Assessment Framework?

The Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF) is a tool that has been developed by Senior Management Committee (SMC) and the Evaluation Unit (EU). The CAF is a new element of IDRC's evaluation system that will support systematic monitoring and reporting on the Centre's progress towards achieving its mission. This assessment considers seven key components, or *Performance Areas*, of IDRC's mission.



Box 1 illustrates the Performance Areas and their relationships to each other. At the centre of the framework are IDRC's strategic goals: *Local Capacity Building* and *Research Results for Policy and Technology Influence*. These represent the mandate reflected in the Centre's Act and CSPF. In the outer ring of the framework are IDRC's five operating principles, which represent the ways that IDRC works to achieve its strategic goals. The commitment to assessing performance in terms of both IDRC's strategic goals and its operating principles underscores a long-held principle at IDRC, that the way the Centre goes about its work is as important as the end-results it achieves.

## Expected Outcomes of the CAF

**1. Empirically Informed Planning and Decision-Making at the Corporate Level:** The CAF gathers empirical information that will help SMC: 1) increase understanding and improve reporting on how IDRC's strategic goals and operating principles are put into practice by its programs and support units; and, 2) identify key issues in the operating environment which enhance or detract from effective performance.

**2. Improved Corporate Accountability:** The CAF provides a structure for organizing and reporting on results at the corporate level. This will improve IDRC's reporting and accountability to its Board of Governors.

**3. Heightened organizational focus on IDRC's mission:** By organizing and reporting on information in relation to IDRC's mission at the corporate level, the CAF heightens sensitivity throughout the organization about the ways that activities undertaken within programs and other working units contribute to IDRC's mission.

### **Why does IDRC need a Corporate Assessment Framework?**

The CAF is designed to help managers make decisions that support programming efforts to achieve the IDRC mission. By monitoring corporate performance related to the strategic goals and operating principles, managers could uncover the strengths in our organizational and programmatic structures and systems. They could also identify where management could address challenges to effective and efficient programming, thereby offering better support to program staff and partners.

The CAF provides a mechanism for management to collect and examine data about the Centre's performance while allowing evaluation at program and project level to retain their learning and use orientation. Program-level learning is a valued aspect of IDRC's evaluation system, but it also comes with trade-offs. In particular, it is difficult to aggregate the diverse results obtained within IDRC's decentralized program portfolio in order to understand how together they contribute to overall corporate achievement. Another issue was noted in the 1994 *Audit of the International Development Research Centre* conducted by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG): that IDRC's evaluation system may not be able to identify "important evaluation questions at the corporate level and IDRC may be missing opportunities to optimize its resources and to target its evaluation studies more strategically."

In order to address these challenges, IDRC has been gradually adding components to its evaluation system in a way that preserves the autonomy of programs to use evaluation studies in ways that they find most useful. Since 1994, two important components have been introduced at the corporate level. These are the Evaluation Unit annual report<sup>1</sup> and strategic evaluations. The Evaluation Unit annual report synthesizes findings from evaluation reports received by the Centre and presents the results to SMC and IDRC's Board of Governors. The second component is strategic evaluations, which provide a mechanism to undertake in-depth examinations of specific issues emerging within the Centre and that cut across programming areas. While both of these elements of the evaluation system focus on corporate learning, they are not based on a definition of good corporate performance. The addition of the CAF provides this new component to the evaluation system. Also, it is consistent with IDRC's use-oriented approach because it is designed to primarily serve SMC's purposes. It provides SMC with a tool to extract data from existing Centre reporting and organize that data around IDRC's mission. Further, it permits a systematic review of this information in relation to specific decision-making needs.

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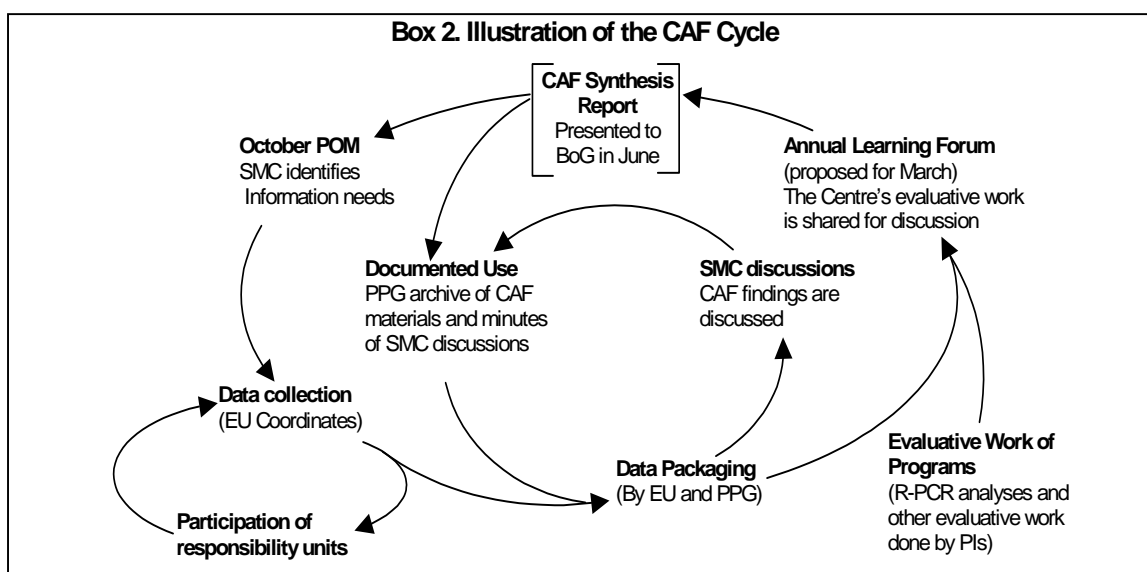
<sup>1</sup> From 1994-2000, the Evaluation Unit annual report was called the Annual Corporate Evaluation Report (ACE). Since 2001, this report has been called the Annual Report on Evaluation Findings (AREF).

## How the CAF works

**1. Method:** The CAF method for monitoring and assessing performance is anchored in the characteristics of good performance that have been articulated for each performance area<sup>2</sup>. Each characteristic of good performance has associated monitoring questions. The method for analysis is straightforward: the monitoring questions prompt analysts to look for and analyze specific information in the indicated data sources. Once these data are collected, the Policy and Planning Group (PPG) and the Evaluation Unit (EU) examine the data, interpret it in relation to the specific purpose, and present it to SMC for discussion and further analysis.

**2. Operations:** In order to be effective, CAF operations will be integrated into on-going activities of the Centre. The CAF process will occur over an 18-month cycle that begins with the October Program and Operational Meeting (POM) (See Box 2). At the time of the POM, SMC will prioritize the strategic issues for which they foresee a need for more information. Using the modular design of the CAF, the EU will develop a plan focusing on the relevant performance areas. SMC will then review and finalize this plan, which will guide CAF activities in the following fiscal year. Then the Evaluation Unit (EU) will begin to coordinate and manage the gathering and collation of data.

PPG and the EU will collaborate to consolidate and present the data to SMC. PPG will liaise with SMC to: 1) determine what information is required by SMC; and 2) determine when that information should come forward for discussion. PPG will archive all CAF documentation. Archived data and minutes from earlier SMC deliberations can then be compared with new data when issues are up for decision. These records will also be useful when the EU, PPG and SMC periodically assess the utility of the CAF performance areas, and decide how to make appropriate modifications.



<sup>2</sup> Characteristics of Good Performance and their associated monitoring questions can be found on the Evaluation Unit intranet site:

Another event – the “Annual Learning Forum” (ALF) – has been proposed as part of the new project completion reporting process: the *Rolling-Project Completion Reports* (R-PCR). A working group is currently testing the R-PCR process, and the ALF is an important component of the *Evaluative Thinking* aspect of corporate performance. At this event, the Centre will gather to review the work of the previous fiscal year and to share experiences about challenges and accomplishments. Although the purpose of the ALF is to review R-PCR data, other information may also become integrated into these discussions. As currently envisioned, CAF data will also feed into these discussions.

Following the ALF, the EU will prepare a synthesis report on all CAF-related activities that have occurred over the previous fiscal year. This report will be presented to SMC and to IDRC’s Board of Governors.

### **Implementation of the CAF**

The responsibilities of the EU, SMC and PPG for the implementation of the CAF are outlined above. In addition, the CAF will directly involve four of the Centre’s support units, which are the focal points for performance areas (see Box 3). Analysts external to the program teams will collect and analyze any information that is required from programs. This work will be managed and coordinated by the Evaluation Unit. Program teams will facilitate access to relevant reports and information.

#### **Box 3. Performance Areas and their Organizational Focal Points**

- *Consideration of Gender:* Gender Unit/Program and Partnership Branch Management
- *Canadian Partnerships:* Special Initiatives Division/Canadian Partnerships (SID/CP)
- *Donor Partnerships:* Partnership and Business Development Division (PBDD)
- *Strategic Intelligence:* Policy and Planning Group (PPG).
- *Evaluative Thinking:* Evaluation Unit (EU)

The CAF is intended to promote coherence between the aims and objectives expressed at the corporate level and those expressed at the program level. It should do so without impinging on the flexibility that program teams require to effectively engage with and adapt to the ever-changing contexts in which they work. Centre managers and staff must be aware that the CAF is an experiment. The Centre is innovating to develop a process that is useful to senior managers for increasing corporate accountability and learning without being onerous on staff and research partners. This will be complex and will require refinement on an ongoing basis.